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Report of the Peacebuilding Commission on its visit to Sierra Leone

I. Overview

1. A delegation of the Sierra Leone configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, composed of the Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in his capacity as Chair of the Sierra Leone configuration, the Permanent Representative of Ghana, the Deputy Permanent Representatives of Australia, Azerbaijan and Sierra Leone and the Minister-Counsellor of Japan travelled to Freetown from 22 to 28 May 2011. The delegation took stock of progress on peace consolidation and identified opportunities for future engagement in the areas of good governance and the rule of law, youth employment and empowerment, and drug trafficking and transnational crime. Discussions during the visit also focused on preparations for the 2012 elections and natural resources management.

2. The delegation met with a wide range of stakeholders in Sierra Leone, including the President, the Minister of Finance and Economic Development, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, members of Parliament, the Executive Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL), members of the United Nations country team, representatives of the major political parties, officials from the National Electoral Commission and the Political Parties Registration Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commissioner, civil society groups and the senior leadership of Fourah Bay College. The delegation also visited two projects partially supported by the Peacebuilding Fund: (a) an agribusiness initiative near Freetown; and (b) Women in Crisis, a centre assisting vulnerable and victimized women.

3. As in previous visits by the Peacebuilding Commission, the delegation noted the considerable strides that Sierra Leone has taken to consolidate peace. The country is in the midst of a transition from the final stages of peacebuilding to a more traditional development approach. The forthcoming elections in 2012 are widely viewed in Sierra Leone as an important indicator of progress. Free, fair and peaceful elections will send a public signal to the international community that Sierra Leone has fully assigned its conflict to history. Nonetheless, significant

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challenges remain in the near and medium term. Despite ambitious programmes in the areas of health, education, agriculture, infrastructure, justice and governance, Sierra Leone will require sustained support to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. The recent growth of social unrest, produced by a substantial rise in food and fuel prices, demonstrates the continued vulnerability of the country to exogenous economic shocks.

4. Discussions with national and international interlocutors drew attention to several more specific needs or areas of commendable achievement. Among these findings, the delegation would like to particularly highlight:

(a) The importance of enhancing dialogue and building trust between the major political parties and national institutions charged with managing the 2012 elections;

(b) The enduring need for police vehicles to enable the Sierra Leone police to respond promptly to election-related disturbances across the country as a whole;

(c) Continuing progress on the institutional foundations for youth employment and an empowerment policy, notably the appointment of a new National Youth Commissioner;

(d) The critical importance of establishing a political, institutional and regulatory framework for managing the natural resource wealth of Sierra Leone in an open and equitable manner;

(e) The continued dedication of the Government of Sierra Leone to fighting corruption, which is essential as the country seeks greater foreign investment and private sector growth;

(f) The proliferation of small, isolated donor projects supporting the Parliament of Sierra Leone has created an approach to building capacity in the institution that is not fully coordinated and efficient;

(g) The widely recognized value of the innovative, integrated approach developed by the United Nations family in Sierra Leone and thus the need to contribute to the multi-donor trust fund for Sierra Leone.

II. Main findings

5. A Peacebuilding Commission delegation travelled to Sierra Leone from 22 to 28 May 2011. The purpose of the visit was to take stock of progress on peace consolidation in three priority areas: good governance and the rule of law, youth employment and empowerment, and drug trafficking and transnational crime. Within this broader scope, the delegation was particularly interested in developments with respect to preparations for the 2012 elections and natural resources management.

6. Logistical impediments reduced the time available for meetings and activities in Sierra Leone to three days. While the delegation completed a large portion of the original programme, it was not possible to rearrange all meetings. The delegation therefore decided to prioritize preparations for the 2012 elections as the central, but not exclusive, focus of the visit. The delegation would like to express its gratitude to both the Government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations family in Sierra Leone

for their warm hospitality, open engagement and insightful advice. The delegation appreciated the degree of flexibility demonstrated by all partners in the face of unexpected developments.

A. Meeting with the President

7. The delegation was particularly grateful to the President of Sierra Leone, Ernest Bai Koroma, for granting a meeting during an extremely demanding period. The President underscored the importance of sustained international engagement after Sierra Leone had "come a long way to build peace". He urged the international community to invest in success in order to fully deliver the dividends of peace and democracy to the Sierra Leone population. As the country continues to develop, Sierra Leoneans are predominantly focused on "bread-and-butter issues". In this respect, the Agenda for Change is driving a transformation in the country, but a leap forward in the well-being of the population is needed. For this, Sierra Leone will also need a leap in international support. The delegation noted that it would continue to reiterate this message in New York and to Sierra Leone's partners. Regarding the 2012 elections, the President expressed his confidence in the National Electoral Commission and the Political Parties Registration Commission, but stressed his concern about the insufficient mobility of the Sierra Leone police. He also noted that civil society would have an important role to play in the elections, but needed to be depoliticized and professionalized.

B. Meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

8. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, J. B. Dauda, also focused heavily on the 2012 elections in his meeting with the delegation. He indicated that he had already invited international observers to monitor the elections and the critical process of voter registration and expressed the full confidence of the Government in the Chair of the National Electoral Commission. The Minister did not expect major changes to the electoral law, as the Government was eager to avoid the impression of changing the rules of the game in its favour. He added that the 2012 elections would be an open process that would give credit to Sierra Leone on the international stage.

9. The Minister expressed concern about the number of small arms and ex-combatants present in the region, particularly as a by-product of the violence in Côte d'Ivoire. The issue was especially worrisome given the coming elections in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The Minister also indicated that Sierra Leone had for the second time invited the African Union peer review mechanism to look at governance issues, noting that few countries would volunteer to go through the process during an election period. The delegation underscored the importance of building trust between the parties and with the Electoral Commission.

C. Presidential, parliamentary and local elections

10. The delegation discussed the 2012 presidential, parliamentary and local elections at length with all relevant stakeholders, including the President, the

Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Finance, parliamentarians, and representatives of the major political parties, the National Electoral Commission, the Political Parties Registration Commission, the Sierra Leone police and civil society. The delegation impressed upon all interlocutors the importance of achieving clarity on the rules of conduct and mechanisms for settling disputes well ahead of the elections. This would enhance the likelihood of a result acceptable to all. The current process of reforming the electoral law provided an opportunity to resolve differences, and the delegation encouraged all parties to participate actively. The delegation was also pleased to hear that logistical preparations were well under way and welcomed the expressed commitment of all interlocutors to a peaceful process. It also strongly commended UNIPSIL for its vital efforts to strengthen political dialogue in Sierra Leone.

11. Several outstanding challenges were identified. The delegation heard from most interlocutors, including at the highest level, that the inadequate mobility of the police remained a major concern. As an illustration, the Sierra Leone police was forced to dispatch vehicles from Freetown to provide security during the most recent by-election. Such a solution obviously would not be available in 2012 when elections take place across the country as a whole. This difficulty was compounded by the limited resources the United Nations could bring to bear in comparison with the support provided by the peacekeeping mission in 2002 and 2007. The Sierra Leone police presented the delegation with a detailed needs assessment for the elections that the Chair would distribute to the members of the configuration in due course.

12. The delegation met the Secretary-General of the governing party, Victor Bockarie Foh of the All People's Congress. Mr. Foh underscored concern about the poor state of the economy and its inevitable negative impact on the ruling party. He called for the Peacebuilding Commission and the international community to continue supporting the National Electoral Commission and the Sierra Leone police as a way to ensure widely accepted election results. He added that the Political Parties Registration Commission was insufficiently empowered and that the number of registered parties included many that were inactive. He concluded by noting that the role of the media would be instrumental in holding peaceful elections.

13. The Chair of the main opposition, John Benjamin of the Sierra Leone Peoples' Party (SLPP), shared his frustration with the process of reappointment of the head of the National Electoral Commission, Christiana Thorpe, and reiterated the party's lack of confidence in Ms. Thorpe. Mr. Benjamin explained that a ruling was expected shortly in the long-standing legal case regarding the decision by the Commission to invalidate a number of votes in traditional SLPP areas during the 2007 elections. He expressed dissatisfaction with the current insufficient geographical representation in Government, which he described as contrasting with the policies of the previous SLPP Government. Finally, Mr. Benjamin stated that the difficulties of SLPP in selecting a presidential candidate were in the process of resolution. The delegation appealed to all political parties to engage in a more productive and open dialogue and to approach the 2012 elections in a spirit of healthy and fair competition.

14. The delegation met with a wide spectrum of civil society actors seized with the elections. It was encouraged by the many civil society-driven initiatives and pleased by the space given by Government to civil society. The delegation met with the All

Political Parties Women Association (APPWA) and the All Political Parties Youth Association (APPYA). APPYA had established a practice of dispatching members to local elections and by-elections to advocate for their peaceful conduct. It also expressed its satisfaction with the appointment of the Youth Commissioner, Anthony Koroma. APPWA was seized with advocacy for women's participation in politics and was mentoring women throughout the country. Both associations asked for greater political participation, possibly through some form of quota in elected bodies (as recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission).

15. The delegation also met with National Elections Watch, a civil society coalition monitoring the electoral process. The delegation learned that the leadership of the National Elections Watch was selected through a competitive process and that the network strove to be represented in all relevant decision-making bodies. The network had the strength to mobilize the media whenever necessary. Prompted by the delegation, the National Election Watch suggested that the National Electoral Commission become more transparent and that it go beyond amending procedural issues in the electoral laws by tackling more fundamental issues underpinning its relationship with the political parties.

16. A meeting with the Interreligious Council provided the delegation with an opportunity to witness the outstanding level of religious tolerance in Sierra Leone. The Council expressed concern about the potential "misuse" of the youth on the part of politicians and noted that communication between the main political parties remained insufficient, as amply illustrated during the celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of independence, when SLPP felt marginalized.

D. Meeting with parliamentarians

17. The delegation met with parliamentarians and the Chair had an opportunity to address a group of representatives. Parliamentarians expressed their frustration at disproportionate donor support for the executive branch at the expense of the legislature. They were of the view that this further unbalanced the relative power between the two branches. The delegation was informed that more than 60 donors were providing assistance to the Parliament. However, in most cases that support took the form of small isolated contributions with high transaction costs. The result was an uncoordinated and supply driven approach. The delegation saw considerable scope for enhancing collaboration between donors and the Parliament.

E. Corruption

18. The delegation had a productive exchange with the Deputy Anti-Corruption Commissioner. The Deputy Commissioner outlined the strategy of the Anti-Corruption Commission to further decentralize its efforts across Sierra Leone, build capacity in ministries, departments and agencies and provide public education, including by working with schools to enhance general understanding of what constitutes corruption. The Deputy Commissioner also shared the results of a recently conducted survey of public perception which identified the Sierra Leone police, the judiciary, the National Revenue Authority and the education system as respectively the most corrupt institutions in the country. As has been the case during previous meetings, the delegation commended the Commission for its sound strategy and

frank engagement with the Peacebuilding Commission. Finally, the Deputy Commissioner explained that political will remained vital, as the "job cannot be done alone". The Commission enjoyed the strong support of the President, but perhaps less unconditional favour among public officials. The delegation and the Deputy Commissioner exchanged ideas based on the experience of other countries. The Deputy Commissioner asked the Peacebuilding Commission to advocate for the Anti-Corruption Commission and stressed the importance of the support of the international community.

F. Youth employment

19. The delegation held a number of meetings at Fourah Bay College, once a leading regional institution now plagued by limited capacity and scarce financial resources. A call was made to the delegation to advocate for more support to be provided to tertiary education in Sierra Leone. The delegation agreed on the need to adequately equip the labour force to meet market demand, including that emanating from foreign investment in activities with higher technological requirements. At the same time the delegation encouraged the College to map the skills required by the market at present and in the foreseeable future in order to deliver employable graduates. In this regard, the delegation saw potential in an embryonic placement centre within the College, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which could be expanded to provide information on the labour market to youth and serve as a clearing house between employers and prospective employees.

G. International partners

20. The delegation met with international partners on several occasions. It was struck by the high degree of coordination present in Sierra Leone and the close working relationship established with the Government. International partners stressed that Sierra Leone represented an example of success that needed to be featured more widely. However, they also noted that levels of poverty remained extremely high and progress on development would require long-term support. The lack of national capacity hampered progress and, while investment in education should bear fruit in the medium to long term, better harnessing the potential of the diaspora might be useful.

21. The issue of post-UNIPSIL Sierra Leone emerged during conversations with international partners and some Government officials. Free, fair and smoothly run 2012 elections will mark the end of the peacebuilding process and the beginning of a traditional development phase. At the same time, the delegation gathered the impression that significant international assistance would be required long after the 2012 elections. The delegation commended international partners for their support and encouraged them to enhance further the capacity-building component of their interventions. The Sierra Leone configuration would intensify conversations with the country and international partners on the role the Peacebuilding Commission should play during the transition from peacebuilding to development.

22. The United Nations country team reiterated in the strongest terms that peace and development were intertwined in Sierra Leone. As such, the late stages of the

peacebuilding process should focus attention increasingly on development, and the indicators used to assess the completion of the peacebuilding process should include measures of progress in economic and social development. Accordingly, the Peacebuilding Commission could help to focus the international community on capacity-building and development needs and advocate for Sierra Leone with potential investors. The Commission could also ensure that the donor community works with the Government rather than against it. This is the case in Sierra Leone because the international community on the ground is well coordinated despite different and sometimes contradictory headquarters policies.

H. Economic outlook

23. The delegation reiterated to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Finance the appreciation of the Peacebuilding Commission for the joint progress report on the implementation of the Agenda for Change presented to the Commission in September 2010. The Ministers indicated that work was already under way for the preparation of the second progress report to be presented to the Commission and other international partners in the autumn of 2011. The Minister of Finance acknowledged that Sierra Leone was encountering budgetary difficulties, but also expressed optimism about future levels of growth. He expected that export levels would increase given the Government's substantial investment in infrastructure.

24. The potentially adverse impact of high fuel and food prices on the consolidation of security and peace emerged as a consideration in most of the delegation's meetings. The recent rapid decline in real purchasing power because of inflation has generated tension. This was particularly evident in the unrest that greeted the Government's decision, on the advice of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to terminate fuel subsidies. The President delivered a statement to the nation on the same day he met with the delegation to explain the Government's policy of moving away from an unsustainable level of fuel subsidies and mitigating the impact by investing in public transport and forgoing revenues from import taxes on rice. The Government is working closely with IMF to address budget imbalances resulting from unexpected revenue shortfalls. The fact that these imbalances were financed unsustainably through borrowing from the Central Bank resulted in an expansion in the monetary base that stoked inflation and raised interest rates at the end of 2010.

25. The outlook for Sierra Leone remains positive, as foreign investment is expected to increase substantially. The development of the private sector will determine the speed of socio-economic development, and the measures presently undertaken (including business-friendly regulations and substantial infrastructure investment) appear to be moving in the right direction. The international community and the Peacebuilding Commission should consider using all available opportunities to advocate for further investment in Sierra Leone.

I. Field visit

26. During a one-day visit to projects with an element of peace consolidation, the delegation joined the Director-General of the United Nations Industrial

Development Organization, the Executive Representative of the Secretary-General and the UNDP country Director to witness the start-up of an agribusiness centre in Newton, near Freetown. The centre is modelled around a successful initiative implemented in Benin and adapted to the local context in Sierra Leone. The delegation also visited the Women in Crisis centre, managed by the United Nations Population Fund. The centre assists female victims of violence and their children through a combination of medical support and life skills training. Finally, the delegation was briefed on the outcome of an activity funded by the Peacebuilding Commission and aimed at improving the relationship between the police and the army through joint training. The delegation heard from senior officials in the security sector that the training had generated a strong positive impact. The delegation also participated in the handover to the Sierra Leone police of the equipment and vehicles utilized for the training.

III. Next steps and recommendations

27. The delegation identified several areas in which the Peacebuilding Commission should either continue its engagement or expand its focus.

28. The Chair, with the support of UNIPSIL and the Peacebuilding Support Office, proposes that the configuration remain seized of progress on the preparations for the 2012 elections with a view to identifying existing challenges and emerging issues as well as sensitizing all stakeholders, including political parties, to the need for healthy, free and fair electoral competition. The configuration could serve as a forum for all relevant actors to discuss practical issues related to the elections. In this respect, the Chair also proposes to organize, at an appropriate time, a meeting with the National Electoral Commission, the Political Parties Registration Commission, and the Sierra Leone police to discuss progress and needs.

29. The Chair plans to invite the Minister of Youth Employment and Sport and the newly appointed Youth Commissioner to discuss the youth employment strategy and opportunities for future cooperation with the Peacebuilding Commission.

30. The Chair, with support from the Peacebuilding Support Office, will explore available means of encouraging donors to meet their commitments to the Sierra Leone multi-donor trust fund.

31. The Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone configurations of the Peacebuilding Commission will continue to work jointly on the issue of transnational crime and drug trafficking, in cooperation with the Economic Community of West African States, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Office for West Africa, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, INTERPOL and other relevant partners.

32. The Chair of the Sierra Leone configuration will engage the Government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations to begin consideration of the potential role of the Peacebuilding Commission following the 2012 elections.

33. The configuration should meet in the autumn of 2011 to monitor progress and discuss outstanding challenges with respect to implementing the Agenda for Change and the United Nations joint vision.

Annex I

Programme of the visit

Day	*Time*	*Activity*
24 May	1630	Delegation arrives at Lungi
	1800	Depart Lungi
	1815	Arrive Freetown
	1845	Arrive Sierra Light House Hotel
25 May	0730	Executive Representative of the Secretary-General joins convoy at Sierra Light House Hotel
	0740	Depart for Newton
	0845	Arrive at Newton
	0900-1145	United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Industrial Development Programme
		Sierra Leone Agribusiness Initiative
		Waterloo
	1300-1430	Buffet lunch with university staff
		Fourah Bay College
	1430-1515	Career advisory placement services
		Fourah Bay College
	1600-1700	Women in Crisis Centre
		Mayenkineh off Calaba Town
	1730-1800	Sierra Leone police and Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces Peacebuilding Fund project
		Transnational Organized Crime Unit, Murray Town
26 May	0900-1000	Anti-Corruption Commissioner
		Palabra hut
	1000-1200	Political parties
		Palabra hut
	1200-1300	National Electoral Commission + Political Parties Registration Commission + Sierra Leone police
		Palabra hut

Day	*Time*	*Activity*
	1300-1345	Buffet lunch with the All Political Parties Youth Association and the All Political Parties Women Association
		United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) conference room
	1415-1500	Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
		Ministry
	1510-1600	Minister of Finance and Economic Development
		Ministry
	1615-1700	Religious leaders
		Palabra hut
	1700-1745	National Elections Watch
		Palabra hut
	2000	Peacebuilding Commission team debrief
		Sierra Light House Hotel
27 May	0715	Executive Representative of the Secretary-General joins delegation for breakfast
		Sierra Light House Hotel (Executive Representative departs for Dakar)
	0900-1030	Parliament
		Parliament
	1100-1140	President of Sierra Leone
		Office of the President
	1200-1300	International partners
		UNIPSIL conference room
	1300-1400	Lunch with UNIPSIL staff
		UNIPSIL terrace
	1400-1445	Debriefing with the Officer-in-Charge of UNIPSIL
		Residence of the Executive Representative of the Secretary-General

Day	*Time*	*Activity*
	1530	Check out
		Sierra Light House Hotel
	1630	Movement control
		Cockeril Barracks
	1645	Depart
		Cockeril Barracks to Lungi
		Depart Lungi

Annex II

Address by the Chair of the Sierra Leone configuration to parliamentarians

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to address this Parliament in the fiftieth year of Sierra Leone's independence. I do so as Chairperson of the Sierra Leone Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, representing the more than 40 states and international organizations that comprise our membership.

Since 2006, this group of partners has sought to maintain international attention on Sierra Leone, to highlight this country's outstanding needs and to provide a source of sustained support. Since 2009, the Peacebuilding Commission has aligned its engagement directly behind Sierra Leone's national strategy for peace consolidation and economic growth, the Agenda for Change. In keeping with the three major risks identified in the Agenda for Change, the Commission has focused on good governance and the rule of law, youth employment and empowerment, and the threat posed by drug trafficking and organized crime. It has also sought to promote gender equality and facilitate greater subregional cooperation.

One overriding conclusion has emerged over the course of the Commission's partnership with Sierra Leone. This country stands as a shining example of what is possible when a nation commits itself to peace and prosperity. Sierra Leone is emerging as one of the world's success stories, a bright light for other countries struggling to reconcile violence to the past. The people of Sierra Leone, through the energy of successive Governments, a vibrant civil society, and a growing private sector, have shown that it is possible to make tremendous progress in 10 short years.

Sierra Leone is also a success story for the international community. ECOWAS, the United Nations, the United Kingdom and other partners provided considerable support immediately after the war. In subsequent years, the United Nations Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone and United Nations country team, led ably by Mr. von der Schulenburg, have developed an innovative approach to peacebuilding now considered a model suitable for replication elsewhere. International partners, including major donors, have come together to coordinate their assistance and work in direct support of national priorities. In many respects, Sierra Leone shows us the way forward. It is an excellent example of how to recover from chaos and conflict, with national and international partners pulling together in the same direction for common cause.

Yet, as Sierra Leone looks forward to a more stable and prosperous future, the Peacebuilding Commission is also mindful that challenges remain. While the holding of successful elections in 2002 and 2007 sent an important positive signal, the elections scheduled for next year also mark a critical threshold. Conducting them in a peaceful, free and fair manner will send an important signal that progress cannot be reversed. In this respect, a significant responsibility falls upon the political parties and their elected representatives. The international community has noted periodic outbreaks of violence surrounding local elections. It has also observed tense relations between the political parties, as well as with the independent institutions charged with organizing, conducting, and overseeing the

elections. This lack of dialogue and trust is a concern. Politics is competitive in all democracies, but it must also occur within a context governed by common national interests, by recognition of the vital roles played by both Government and loyal opposition, and by an underlying duty to the people of Sierra Leone.

For all of these reasons, the Peacebuilding Commission has stressed the critical importance of implementing the commitments made by the political parties in the joint communiqué signed in 2009. Several institutional steps are also required. The electoral reform process should be completed as soon as possible. The Political Parties Registration Commission needs to be strengthened and the National Electoral Commission must make greater efforts to gain the confidence of all parties. The Sierra Leone police and other security agencies require adequate capacity to ensure a secure and safe environment for voters.

Beyond these institutions, the elections will also call on Sierra Leonean society as a whole. Paramount Chiefs and traditional authorities, religious leaders, the youth and civil society organizations all have a constructive role to play in advocating for tolerance and peace. The media, including important institutions like the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists and Editors' Guild, must assume greater responsibility for unbiased and factual reporting. In short, Sierra Leoneans of all professions and affiliations must work together to bridge political divides.

As this Parliament also strives to build a more united society, it also has an important role to play in the empowerment of women. The Peacebuilding Commission deeply appreciated the visit by a delegation of women's representatives to New York in April of this year, led by former First Lady, Mme. Kabbah, and the Right Honourable Mme. Jalloh. The delegation outlined the impressive strides that Sierra Leone has taken to foster stronger women's participation in politics and safeguard the rights of women and children. Nonetheless, it is evident that more progress is needed, especially with respect to building women's capacity to serve as leaders and countering the scourge of sexual and gender-based violence.

Looking beyond these immediate political issues, the Peacebuilding Commission is also conscious that Sierra Leone faces longer-term challenges. One challenge is youth employment and empowerment. This issue can only be fully addressed in conjunction with enduring private sector growth. Here Parliament has an important oversight function. Economic progress depends on an enabling context. Sierra Leone has made impressive progress in establishing a friendly regulatory environment, but corruption remains a major impediment to further international investment. Likewise, natural resources offer the promise of economic development and employment, but, as we have seen in so many other countries, managing mineral wealth in a transparent and effective manner is not an easy task for any Government. Parliament shares a critical responsibility for ensuring that Sierra Leone's population as a whole benefits from economic progress in an equitable manner.

Transnational organized crime is another challenge. Drug trafficking is a pernicious threat that transcends national borders and afflicts the subregion as a whole. Sierra Leone has developed a robust, integrated response to this challenge and is among the most advanced in the subregion. At the same time, progress here also depends on progress elsewhere. The Peacebuilding Commission is also working with Guinea, Liberia, and Guinea-Bissau on this issue and is keen to see the

ECOWAS region as a whole build capacity to resist the impact of transnational organized crime.

The purpose of this visit by the Peacebuilding Commission has been to better understand how Sierra Leone is confronting these challenges. The delegation has met with a wide range of stakeholders, including the President and several ministers, the major political parties, national officials responsible for elections, policing, anti-corruption efforts, a wide range of civil society organizations, the United Nations and representatives of the international community. We have been struck by the commitment and energy of all. We will convey our observations about both the evident progress and outstanding needs to our partners, including the Security Council, General Assembly, international financial institutions and regional organizations.

In closing, let me commend all Sierra Leoneans for setting an example for the world. That a country so recently embroiled in civil war is contributing to international peacekeeping in Sudan is no small accomplishment. That a country suffering from a weak economy and poor social services now looks forward to new infrastructure, reliable energy, better child and maternal health care, and a prosperous future is an indication of just how much can be achieved when a nation works together. The international community has invested strongly in peace in Sierra Leone. With the conduct of free, fair and peaceful elections next year, further progress on good governance and growing employment, it will see that investment repaid. Congratulations on your success and I encourage you to maintain the course.

Thank you.